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ROOFER SOON 84

Has Dozens Of Inventions

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By Herb Owens

CLARION, IA.—The boundless energy of Eugene Allen, who will be 84 on Mar. 28, has produced dozens of inventions and reams of handwritten manuscripts.

And some of Allen's inventions, only a few of which have been patented, have been of inestimable value as he has pursued a 30-year career in the roofing business.

For instance, he designed and built a conveyor that lifts bundles of material to a roof. It also is used to load and unload materials between trucks and warehouse.

Another device is an adjustable catwalk that expedites the roofer's work. And there are devices to level the planks on ladder jacks; and to speed up "valley trimming" with asphalt roofing.

Allen, a veteran railroad boilermaker who turned to shipyard crane operation in World War I, says: "People around here think I'm a nut — because I'm always working on something and I won't tell what it is. They just can't understand that."

One of Allen's devices — an electric automatic train control that he says would prevent head-on crashes of railroad locomotives — has been patented in four countries.

There are dozens of items on which Allen hasn't sought patents: A device to expedite parachute opening; a parachute guiding gadget; a non-skid crutch toe, an apparatus that prevents freezing of auto radiators and blocks, of water meters and of exposed water pipes; an instrument for holding the human eye open during examination.

The Better Mousetrap

Allen also has made models of the better mousetrap, a vacuum dust mop cleaner, an automatic fire extinguisher, a mobile workbench, a record-keeping device, and dozens of gadgets of the "household hint" variety — such as switches to turn on lights when a door is opened, and a light bulb to keep bottles of milk from freezing in the delivery box.

Born at Stonington, Ill., one of 11 children, Allen was 19 when he went to Eagle Grove as a boilermaker for the North Western Railway. After four years he was married to Edith Marie Lalor, moving then to work for the Milwaukee Railroad at Spokane, Wash.

For three years in World War I, Allen operated cranes and huge hydraulic presses in shipbuilding at Seattle. In 1919 he brought Mrs. Allen to Clarion, where he became a "crew caller" for the Great Western Railway. When ship operations were moved to

Oelwein, he became leverman at the rail crossroads here.

Has Written 15 Manuscripts

Thirty years ago Allen left railroading to start his own roofing business. Several months ago he reroofed houses on which he first worked almost 30 years ago. Except for hiring occasional assistance, Allen works alone.

Mrs. Allen carries a burden as heavy as her husband's. Since he lost his hearing 11 years ago, she has been secretary, bookkeeper, estimator, collector and human intercom.

Allen's hobby, it should be called, is writing. He has handwritten 15 manuscripts — mostly scientific novels and imaginative "space" fiction — but never has submitted anything to a publisher. One of his manuscripts totals 1.45 million words; he knows that his punctuation and spelling lack perfection, but he enjoys the long hours of writing.

The Allens have a son, Howard of Falls Church, Va., a retired Army officer now with the Central Intelligence Agency, and a daughter, Mrs. Mildred Payton of Des Moines. There are three granddaughters and two great-grandchildren.

TOMORROW: Eldora nature teacher.



ALLEN